Melbourne Vic. 3004
17 April 2009

Productivity Commission
Australian Government

Submission from Peter Rose on Parallel Importation of Books

Like the vast majority of authors and publishers, I am dismayed by – and frankly incredulous at – the proposal to reduce authors' copyright from life plus seventy years to one year. As a professional author, magazine editor, and plain old lover of Australian writing, I share my profession's strong apprehensions about what is proposed and urge the authorities and the federal government to protect this cultural asset and to reject this clear threat to the viability of the Australian publishing industry in its present form.

Copyright, for hundreds of years, has been a fundamental guardian of artistic and intellectual endeavour. It should not be tampered with or watered down lightly – certainly not for some dubious, contested commercial advantage.

No other comparable country has been prepared to diminish writers' copyright in this way. Why is it being proposed now? Writers are entitled to feel nervous about and suspicious of the motives of those proposing such a radical change.

The immense transformation and expansion of the Australian literary culture since the 1970s is one of the glories of our cultural life. Does the government appreciate what has been achieved: the quality, the abundance, the international influence? Is the government aware that more than half the books sold in this country now are written by Australians – a ratio that would have been inconceivable two decades ago? Does government value Australian writing? The Australian publishing industry employs tens of thousands of people and presents the work of Australian writers to extensive and responsive markets here and abroad. Compare this with the massively subsidised Australian film industry, whose audiences, revenue and critical influence are modest.

It really beggars belief as to why anyone would want to tamper with this vital legislation or play so fast and loose with our literary culture.

Sincerely

Peter Rose